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Governor Schwarzenegger Proposes Cutting Benefits to Amputees

WASHINGTON, DC—March 12, 2010 – In a stunning development, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has proposed to the state legislature a budget policy that includes an option which would eliminate all payments under California Medicaid for the prosthetic and orthotic devices used by amputees and those with other limb impairments.

These disabled Medi-Cal patients are patients with diabetes, peripheral vascular disease, cerebral palsy and multiple sclerosis and others who are severely disabled. This proposal would cast the cost cutting net to include patient care facilities that provide care to California's amputees and other people with disabilities (PWD), including children with disabilities covered by Medi-Cal. This has prompted many fears among amputees and other PWD's, in addition to those involved in providing care and restoring mobility to these persons, many of whom are Medi-Cal beneficiaries.

“Americans have been heartened to see, among our veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, the tremendous improvements that are now available for those who have lost a limb or have impaired mobility due to limb injuries,” said James A. Kaiser, CP, president of the American Orthotic and Prosthetic Association (AOPA). “This proposed change is incomprehensible...it would be profoundly unfair for California's legislature to pay for the state's financial shortfalls by reducing Medi-Cal payments to amputees and others, including disabled children, who are served under the current Medi-Cal plan which covers orthotic and prosthetic devices indispensable to these patients' mobility.”

Ironically, in 2006, California's state legislature enacted a state orthotic and prosthetic parity bill to assure that all insurers provide the identical coverage for amputee care that is provided for all other medical and surgical conditions. Some insurers had limited these patients to one replacement limb per life or very small, unrealistic dollar limits on reimbursing for replacement limbs.

“It's a sad day when California's Governor is talking about balancing the budget on the backs of amputees. To think that our senior citizens, children and others with disabilities are now going to be denied the limb loss care they need to remain an active part of the community and to stay healthy is just another example of the shortsightedness of policy makers. This must not be allowed to happen,” said Kendra Calhoun, President and CEO of the Amputee Coalition of America (ACA).

“These devices are specially made for patients who have lost limbs and rely on them being properly made to make their daily lives functional. The idea that California would even consider cutting payments for such a sensitive patient population is a cruel joke,” says Kel Bergmann, CPO, of SCOPE Orthotics and Prosthetics, Inc., who operates 13 prosthetic and orthotic patient care facilities in California.

“What a dumb place to scrape around for the last budget dollar of the largest state in our country,” said Thomas Fise, the CEO of the American Orthotic and Prosthetic Association (AOPA). “Governor Schwarzenegger can’t possibly understand the impact here. There is plenty of inappropriate payment in this area, including crooks masquerading as if they were legitimate prosthetic and orthotic providers, when they in truth know nothing about making these devices. We have offered up lots of ways to save money here, without hurting quality providers and disabled patients. This makes absolutely no sense—isn’t there a better way for California?”

For further information on preserving needed O&P benefits in California visit www.AOPAnet.org.

AOPA, based in Alexandria, Virginia, is the largest non-profit organization dedicated to helping orthotic and prosthetic businesses and professionals navigate the multitude of issues surrounding the delivery of quality patient care. The association was founded when needs of returning veterans in the aftermath of World War I required a national organization to address the educational and research requirements of the industry.

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The Amputee Coalition, based in Knoxville, Tennessee, is a national nonprofit organization whose mission is “to reach out to and empower people affected by limb loss to achieve their full potential through education, support and advocacy, and to promote limb loss prevention.”

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